

# *How You Can Help Your Community To Grow Smart*

A Guide For  
New England  
Community Officials

**sprawl (sprot)** **1.** To cause to spread out in a straggling or disordered way. **2.** Haphazard growth or extension outward, especially that resulting from new housing on the outskirts of a city.

-Webster's Dictionary

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Smart growth recognizes the connections between development and quality of life. In general, smart growth invests time, attention and resources in restoring vitality to center cities and older suburbs. It ensures that growth in newly developing areas has a minimum impact on the environment and local taxes.

Compared to prevailing development patterns since World War II, smart growth is more town-centered, transit and pedestrian-oriented, and has a better mix of housing, commercial and retail use. It preserves open space and other natural resources. There is no "one-size-fits-all" solution.

EPA New England views smart growth as an efficient way to protect people and the environment by ensuring clean water, clean air and clean land, reuse of abandoned industrial sites and environmental justice for all citizens.

Following are the 10 principles for better land use adopted by the National Governors' Association at their annual summer meeting, 1999.

- ❶ Mix land uses
- ❷ Take advantage of existing community assets
- ❸ Create a range of housing opportunities and choices
- ❹ Foster "walkable" close-knit neighborhoods
- ❺ Promote distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place, including the rehabilitation and use of historic buildings
- ❻ Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty and critical environmental areas
- ❼ Strengthen and encourage growth in existing communities
- ❽ Provide a variety of transportation choices
- ❾ Make development decisions predictable, fair and cost effective
- ❿ Encourage citizen and stakeholder participation in development decisions

# *Growth, Sprawl & Your Community*

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Growth and Smart Growth are not to be confused. Smart Growth means healthy and safe neighborhoods in urban, suburban and rural areas; protected natural resources and open space; clean air and water; and equity and diversity in all communities.

Sprawl or inefficient growth pollutes streams, rivers, bays, lakes and ponds; encourages traffic congestion and pollution from vehicles; devours open space, farmland and habitat for wildlife; spoils town and city centers; and lowers quality of life.

To help your community grow smart, set community goals that guide your growth while they also:

- Protect Natural Resources
- Encourage Compact Development
- Preserve Community Character
- Provide Housing And Transportation Choices
- Engage The Public In Planning And Decision Making

## Fact:

In 50% of New Hampshire communities, 10% or less of their open space is protected.

-NH's Changing Landscape. Society for the Protection of NH Forests and the NH Chapter of The Nature Conservancy, Oct. '99

- Protect drinking water with local regulations such as aquifer and well-head protection, flood plain regulation, limits on impervious surfaces, enhanced wetland protection, and best management practices for handling storm water.
- Protect plants and animals through shoreline and stream-side buffers, vernal pool and surrounding upland protection, and prioritize open space protection with wildlife corridors in mind
- Restore damaged ecosystems when new development comes in. For example, replant with native species, require zero runoff, limit asphalt coverage, require state of the art septic systems
- Dedicate a portion of the community's annual budget for open space protection/acquisition
- Protect working farms with agricultural preservation zoning and tax incentives
- Think beyond town boundaries on a regional and watershed basis
- Provide funding mechanisms for implementation of town goals such as open space or drinking water protection through impact fees, real estate transfer taxes, water fee set-asides

## Fact:

Massachusetts loses 44 acres of woods, forest, fields or farms to residential, commercial or industrial development every day.

-Losing Ground, by Jennifer Steel. MA Audubon Society. May '99

## *Encourage Compact Development*

- Promote development that mixes more than one use per building (e.g., commercial and housing, public services and retail)
- Reuse abandoned buildings and sites, and where appropriate place higher density housing near commercial centers and transit routes, parks, job centers, sewer and utility lines
- Redesign under-utilized shopping areas to include housing, services, entertainment and public spaces
- Protect open space by making conservation subdivisions easier to permit, or establish a purchase of development rights program or transfer of development rights program
- Create neighborhoods, not just subdivisions, with well-defined centers and edges
- Rehabilitate older schools by eliminating environmental and health hazards before building new schools in undeveloped areas. Hazards include lead paint, pesticides, asbestos, cleaning products, chemistry lab chemicals and radon
- Channel development to areas with adequate existing infrastructure (e.g., roads, sewer, water)
- Plan and build infrastructure in places where growth should occur (e.g., in existing town centers) and do not build infrastructure in areas that warrant protection

### Fact:

Between 1970 and 1995 the number of elementary and secondary school students in Maine actually declined by 27,000. Yet from 1975 to 1995 Maine allocated \$727 million to new school construction and additions.

-The Cost of Sprawl. May '97 ME State Planning Office

- Craft a master plan and ordinances that promote the goals of your community with measurable results and time-lines
- Adopt downtown and main street design guidelines
- Locate town hall, library, schools, transit stations and post offices in town center
- Institute an architectural review process
- Insist on pedestrian-scaled buildings
- Integrate housing into town centers (e.g., encourage full use of vacant upper stories including housing or services)
- Ensure that growth does not stress the community's budget
- Use your town center or main street for civic celebrations
- Rehabilitate abandoned buildings for town use
- Protect scenic roads
- Adopt historic district zoning
- Delay demolition, landmark laws
- Protect historic or architectural features with special permits
- Adopt sign-control ordinances to enhance the aesthetic appeal of your community
- Prepare an open-space protection plan; work to implement the plan with local, regional and state-wide land conservation partners

## Fact:

Rhode Island has developed land at 9 times the rate of their population growth.

-The Cost of Sprawl and Urban Decay. Grow Smart RI, '00

## *Provide Housing & Transportation Choices*

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- Encourage pedestrian and bike use by adding street trees, benches, on-street parking; consolidating curb cuts; adding cross walks; and enforcing speed limits
  - Use “Traffic Calming” techniques
  - Keep local roads narrow to control speed, reduce speed limits and enforce those limits. Add street trees to slow traffic
  - Increase incentives to use public transportation
  - Reduce incentives for single occupancy vehicles
  - Review your community’s parking requirements; consider shared parking
  - Design street patterns with multiple connections and direct routes to spread traffic
  - Incorporate transit-oriented design features into new development or redevelopment
  - Encourage a wide range of affordable housing choices so that seniors, singles, and young people are not priced out of their home towns
  - Mix housing types to encourage diversity within neighborhoods
  - Achieve, where appropriate, an average density of 6 to 7 housing units per acre to make transit possible
  - Eliminate or reduce environmental and health hazards in new housing, in renovated housing, and in building maintenance practices
  - Enforce environmental and public health codes such as trash disposal, recycling, lead paint removal, and asbestos removal
  - Promote home ownership



- Use a consensus process with a wide range of community interests to update your master/comprehensive plan
- Have on board a conservation commission agent, a planner, a board of health agent, an environmental enforcement officer, a certified building inspector
- Develop an easily understood, coordinated development process, including preliminary site plan review meetings
- Adopt growth bylaws such as
  - designated growth areas
  - limits on building permits per year
  - phased growth bylaws
  - performance-based development standards and impact fees
  - service boundaries for sewer and water that supports the community's vision and regulations
- Use local regulations to support rather than detract from local planning goals
- Educate the public about septic system maintenance, water conservation, recycling, indoor air quality, lead paint removal, asbestos removal, radon detection and healthy ecosystems
- Provide funding mechanisms to implement town goals

**Fact:**

From 1981 to 1996, the annual number of miles driven by each Vermonter increased by an average of 43%.

-Exploring Sprawl #2  
a publication of The Vermont Forum on Sprawl

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Communities Promote Sustainable Land-Use  
<http://www.epa.gov/region5/sprawl/index.html>

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<http://www.sprawlwatch.org>

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